CheckSure
INDEPENDENT NEW-HOME INSPECTIONS

BUYING A NEW HOME

What is a pre-completion inspection?

When it happens, what the NHQB checklist covers and why an independent professional can add value

PART OF THE CHECKSURE HOMEOWNER KNOWLEDGE BASE

Buying a new home	Handover	Snagging	Warranties	Home maintenance	Heating and ventilation
Electrical safety	Gardens	Building standards	Connectivity	Energy efficiency	General advice

The short answer: a pre-completion inspection is a structured visual inspection of a new home shortly before legal completion. For homes protected by the New Homes Quality Code, the buyer must be given an opportunity to inspect the home or appoint a suitably qualified inspector using the standard NHQB checklist. Its purpose is to identify visible snags while the property is sufficiently complete to assess and before ownership transfers.

CheckSure's Homeowner Knowledge Base draws on practical experience of building, inspecting and resolving defects in new homes. Our aim is to explain what homeowners should reasonably expect, what may require further investigation and what steps they can take next.

Why inspect before completion?

A newly built home should be completed carefully and checked by the developer before handover. Even so, construction involves many trades, hundreds of components and a demanding programme. Minor finishing issues can remain, and occasionally an inspection identifies something more important that needs clarification before the customer collects the keys.

The pre-completion inspection creates a defined opportunity to look at the finished home calmly and produce a written record. It does not transfer the developer's quality-control responsibility to the buyer. The developer should already have completed its own checks and should aim to deliver a home without snags or defects.

For qualifying purchases, this opportunity is part of the New Homes Quality Code. Version 2 applies to homes reserved from an active registered developer from 2 March 2026. Earlier qualifying reservations use the earlier Code. Buyers should check the exact developer entity and registration date on the NHQB register.

When does the inspection take place?

A pre-completion inspection happens after the home is sufficiently complete to inspect but before legal completion. It is one checkpoint in the buying process, not a replacement for the developer's own quality checks or for later reporting of defects.

The inspection takes place before legal completion, once the home is sufficiently finished and safe to enter. It is different from a customer demonstration or home-familiarisation visit, which usually explains heating, ventilation, appliances, meters, alarms and maintenance. The developer may combine appointments for convenience, but the inspection needs enough time and freedom to complete the checklist properly.

Ask about arrangements early. The developer should explain the proposed date, how long access is allowed, who may attend, any site-safety requirements and where the report should be sent. If rooms, external areas or services cannot be inspected, the limitation should be recorded and a suitable later check requested.

The timing must be meaningful. An inspection undertaken while trades are still completing major work may generate an unreliable list and make finished surfaces difficult to assess. Equally, the buyer should not be rushed through a supposedly complete home without a reasonable opportunity to inspect it.

What does the inspection cover?

The NHQB provides separate checklists for houses and apartments. Both are designed to examine the standard of finish and identify items requiring attention. The inspection is non-disruptive and non-invasive: fixtures, fittings and services are considered in a way similar to normal day-to-day use, without opening up the construction or dismantling components.

Typical areas include walls, ceilings, floors, internal doors, windows, fitted furniture, sanitary fittings, visible plumbing, electrical accessories, heating controls and ventilation components. The inspector records whether areas appear complete, operate normally and meet the relevant visual or measurable expectations within the checklist's scope.

For a house, safely accessible external areas may include elevations, roof-level features visible from the ground, paths, drives, drainage, boundaries and the garden. For an apartment, the inspection normally includes the dwelling and common entrances, corridors and facilities an occupier would ordinarily use. It does not extend into every plant room, roof, service riser or restricted part of the building.

Figure 1. A professional pre-completion inspection records visible defects systematically before legal completion.

What is outside the scope?

A pre-completion inspection is not a structural survey, warranty inspection or Building Regulations approval. It does not certify that every concealed component has been installed correctly. Insulation behind plasterboard, underground drainage, foundations, fire-stopping inside closed cavities and other hidden work usually cannot be verified by a visual, non-invasive visit.

The inspector should not carry out unsafe access, destructive testing or specialist commissioning unless separately qualified, equipped and instructed. Suspected structural, fire, gas, electrical or water-safety concerns should be recorded clearly and referred for the appropriate specialist evidence or urgent action.

Weather and seasonal conditions also affect what can be concluded. Heavy rain may prevent assessment of some finishes but reveal drainage concerns. dry weather may mean drainage cannot be observed in operation. A limitation is not a failure of the report when it is stated honestly and followed by a sensible recommendation.

Can a buyer carry out the inspection?

Yes. The Code allows the customer to inspect, and the NHQB makes the house and apartment checklists available for buyers who choose to do it themselves. A careful buyer can identify obvious marks, unfinished sealant, damaged fittings, doors that do not close and many other visible issues.

However, the March 2026 checklist explains that it was designed to be carried out by a suitably qualified professional. It warns that someone who is not qualified to survey residential property may overlook or misinterpret requirements or standards that the builder must follow. That is a significant and sensible caution, particularly for buyers with limited construction experience.

Why a professional inspection can be worthwhile

The professional's principal advantage is not a special legal status. A developer is not obliged to accept an item merely because a professional has written it, and the buyer does not gain additional rights simply by paying for an inspection. The benefit lies in competence, independence and the quality of the evidence.

An experienced inspector should follow a consistent sequence, understand the current checklist and recognise common problems without becoming distracted by the excitement or pressure surrounding completion. They are more likely to know when a finish should be judged from a prescribed viewing position, when a measurement may need comparison with an industry tolerance and when an issue needs escalation rather than an overconfident conclusion.

Clear reporting also matters. “Bathroom is poor” gives the developer little to investigate. A useful schedule identifies the room, precise location, condition, relevant photograph and action requested. It distinguishes a snag from possible damage, incomplete work, a maintenance matter or a concern that requires specialist review. This makes the list easier to allocate to trades and provides a stronger baseline for follow-up.

A professional can be especially valuable where the home is large, access time is limited, the buyer cannot attend, or the property contains complex systems. Buyers should still read the report and raise anything personal to their purchase, such as omitted extras, specification changes or damage noticed during their own visit.

What makes an inspector suitably qualified?

Under the NHQB checklist guidance, a suitably qualified inspector should be a member of a recognised professional association experienced in surveying residential property, comply with that association's inspection guidance and hold relevant, adequate professional indemnity insurance. Examples listed by NHQB include bodies such as CABE, CIOB, ICWCI, RICS and RPSA, but buyers should check the individual's actual experience and scope rather than relying on initials alone.

Before appointing an inspector, ask whether they use the current NHQB checklist, what areas and operational checks are included, how limitations are recorded, whether external areas and accessible common parts are covered, how quickly the report will be delivered and whether follow-up support is available. Confirm membership, insurance, terms and price in writing.

Be cautious about promises to find “every defect”, certify compliance or replace building control. No competent non-invasive inspection can guarantee that all concealed issues will be found.

How should snags be recorded?

Each item should be factual, specific and proportionate. Record the room or elevation, exact position, issue, photograph and proposed correction. Avoid combining many unrelated items into one entry. Numbering the schedule makes it easier to track the developer's response and the completion of remedial work.

The report should also identify the inspection date, plot and development, inspector details, qualifications and insurance where applicable, plus anything that could not be checked. Keep the original report and photographs in the purchase file. Subsequent updates should show whether each item is accepted, booked, attempted, complete or disputed rather than replacing the evidence with a new unconnected list.

What happens after the report is submitted?

The developer should acknowledge and address reported items through the completion or after-sales process. The New Homes Quality Code expects after-sales issues to be dealt with as soon as possible and, in most situations, settled within 30 days. Where there is a significant reason for delay, the developer should explain it and provide updates at least monthly.

Not every snagging entry is automatically a formal complaint. If the developer rejects items, repeatedly misses arrangements or does not provide a satisfactory route to resolution, the buyer can use the developer's formal complaints procedure. Under Code Version 2, that process includes written milestones at five, 10, 30 and 56 days, with potential referral to the New Homes Ombudsman Service after the applicable stage and subject to its scheme rules.

Can more issues be reported after moving in?

Yes. A pre-completion inspection is not the buyer's only opportunity to identify a problem. Some issues appear only when the home is occupied, the heating has run, appliances are used or weather changes. Qualifying developers must provide an after-sales service for the first two years after completion, and customers should report concerns promptly through the stated channel.

The new-home warranty also remains important, particularly for matters within its cover. The Code, developer aftercare, warranty and legal rights overlap in places but are not interchangeable. If responsibility is unclear or the potential consequence is serious, obtain appropriate independent advice.

Special care with gardens and unfinished external areas

External areas should be inspected only when access is safe and the condition can tolerate it. Fresh turf is commonly laid shortly before handover. If it has not rooted, walking across it can leave deep impressions, move joints and damage the finished surface. The appropriate professional response may be to inspect from paths and boundaries, record the limitation and recommend a closer inspection once the lawn is established—not to damage it merely to complete the checklist.

Continuing construction can also restrict drives, paths, boundaries or communal areas. Record what was unavailable, ask when it will be complete and retain the developer's schedule of incomplete development work.

A buyer's practical checklist

- Confirm that the developer and reservation are covered by the applicable New Homes Quality Code.
- Ask for the inspection arrangements well before the anticipated completion date.
- Choose between a careful self-inspection and a suitably qualified, insured professional.
- Make sure the current NHQB house or apartment checklist will be used.
- Give the inspector the specification, extras list, plans and known changes where available.
- Record inaccessible areas, unavailable services, weather limitations and unfinished work.
- Submit the report through the developer's stated channel and keep proof of delivery.
- Track every item against one numbered schedule and preserve photographs.
- Escalate through the formal complaints procedure if after-sales handling is unsatisfactory.

Common misunderstandings

“A passed building-control inspection means there can be no snags”

No. Building control and snagging have different purposes and inspection scopes. Regulatory oversight does not confirm that every visible finish is free from damage or incomplete work.

“A snagging inspector can open walls and inspect everything”

No. The standard pre-completion inspection is non-invasive. Concealed construction generally requires records, specialist investigation or another type of survey.

“The developer must accept a professional report in full”

No. A professional report is structured evidence, not a binding ruling. Disputed items may require clarification, further evidence, the complaints process or independent dispute resolution.

“Anything missed before completion becomes the buyer’s problem”

No. Buyers can report later issues through the after-sales service, subject to responsibility, evidence and relevant time limits. Prompt reporting is still advisable.

Frequently asked questions

How long does an inspection take?

It depends on the size, type, condition and access arrangements. Buyers should be wary of treating a fixed short duration as suitable for every home. Ask the inspector how the proposed time relates to the property and checklist.

Should utilities be connected?

Operational services allow more meaningful checks of fittings and controls. If electricity, water, heating or ventilation cannot be operated, record the limitation and arrange the appropriate later test or demonstration.

Is it the same as a home demonstration?

No. A home demonstration explains how to use and maintain the property. A pre-completion inspection checks finish and identifies snags. Both are useful and should not be confused.

Should I attend if I appoint a professional?

Attendance can be useful if the developer and site rules permit it, but it is not essential to the professional’s independence. Agree beforehand how questions, specification issues and urgent findings will be handled.

Key takeaways

- A pre-completion inspection is a structured visual check shortly before legal completion.
- Qualifying buyers can inspect personally or appoint a suitably qualified inspector using the NHQB checklist.
- The inspection is non-invasive and is not a structural survey or regulatory certificate.
- Professional value comes from competence, systematic coverage and precise evidence—not automatic acceptance by the developer.
- Check professional membership, relevant experience, insurance and scope before appointment.
- Limitations should be recorded honestly and followed up at the right time.
- More issues can still be reported after completion through the developer’s after-sales process.

If you have already completed

A CheckSure New-home Snagging Inspection is the systematic post-completion service, ideally arranged soon after your completion or occupation. It reviews the visible and accessible home room by room and component by component.

If you are later in the developer's initial defects or after-sales period, the CheckSure End-of-Defects Period Inspection uses the full applicable post-completion sequence. It can be arranged whether or not you had an earlier snagging inspection and also records outstanding matters, failed repairs and relevant concerns that have emerged during occupation.

> If you would like an independent assessment, use the CheckSure inspection-services page to choose the service that matches your stage: Pre-Completion, New-home Snagging or End-of-Defects Period.

EXPLORE FURTHER Explore the CheckSure Homeowner Knowledge Base for related guidance on buying, inspecting and looking after a new home. Please visit checksure.co.uk/knowledge-base/

Sources & References

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